

DAS Countryman: Good afternoon! Thank you, I am very happy to be in Skopje again on a summer day. When I planned this trip a month ago, I had planned to go first to Pristina and then Skopje, and then Tirana. Because of air travel I ended up in Tirana yesterday, Pristina tomorrow. I am very happy to be able to have these meetings today as we planned them a month ago, very much the same set of meetings that I did when I was here on October to see the Prime Minister, to see Mr. Crvenkovski, to see Mr. Ahmeti. I am especially happy that I was able to confirm to the Prime Minister the invitation to be in Washington next week. We look forward to having him there, we've worked on this idea for a long time and it's quite appropriate given the state of friendship between our two countries. We viewed the agenda that each of us intends to bring to the table in his meetings next week.

Question: Mr. Countryman, some media reported that you are here to warn the Prime Minister after the current situation occurred, you know that the opposition left the Parliament, there are some court processes, pressure over media, etc. Is this true and do you support early elections if some parties boycott the elections?

DAS Countryman: First, I don't give warnings to Prime Ministers. We discuss sincerely our concerns, and you know what our concerns are about issues that reflect rule of law or freedom of the media because we write them clearly in our Human Rights Report, and the European Union writes them clearly in their Progress Report. We share those concerns and they are always an appropriate topic of discussion between two friendly countries. On elections, no, I don't have any comment on that. That's a domestic political concern that I expect political leaders to deal with responsibly.

Question: Did you mention these concerns at this meeting?

DAS Countryman: Whose concerns?

Question: Concerns about the judicial processes and whatever was mentioned in the previous question, sir.

DAS Countryman: Yes.

Question: You voiced them out to the Prime Minister?

DAS Countryman: The Prime Minister knows what to expect of topics that we will raise and now we have a good idea of the topics that he will, as well. That's what we do when we get our leaders together.

Question: Do you see a clear vision from the leadership on where this country is going?

DAS Countryman: That's a very cosmic question. That is much grander than (laughter)... I'll think about it when I reach a state of cosmic consciousness.

Question: Do you think that great instability is possible in the region, having in mind what is going on in Albania, in Serbia, in Kosovo and Macedonia?

DAS Countryman: I am concerned about the situation in Albania, and I made a very long speech about that in Albania yesterday. But, Albania, Macedonia, Serbia are distinct countries and the roots of the different problem that they face are domestic. They are not connected one with another and each has to be looked as a separate situation.

Question: Did you touch the name issue?

DAS Countryman: It is very hard to come to Skopje and not touch the name issue, but again, the United States is not involved in the negotiations. We welcome the fact that the two Prime Ministers have met several times and that they have addressed the issue directly, confidentially and respectfully. We continue to have hope that this process will lead to a resolution, but we don't make predictions and we don't jump in the middle of those discussions. Thank you!